

## Be Careful What You Call

Calvin Campbell

---

Every set at a Modern Western Square Dance is usually made up of dancers with a wide range of skills and experience. It's the caller's job to figure out what most of them can understand and dance. The ideal would be for everyone to be able to dance every routine every time. From a practical viewpoint, a reasonable target would be aim for 85% of the dancers to succeed at least 85% of the time.

Dancers mainly want to have fun. Most of them aren't interested in learning anything new. If you asked them to tell you what they danced the previous tip, few would be able to do so. When they are dancing, their attention is focused on doing each movement in the sequence. They don't remember what "basics" the caller called. They only know whether they succeeded or failed.

All square dancers try to predict what is likely to be called next. The prediction options depend on the current FA, and the dancers' experience with being in the FA. So, be careful of what you call.

Dancers do recognize and remember patterns. Here is an example. If the caller chooses to do something from facing lines of four such as **Pass Thru ... Wheel and Deal ... Double Pass Thru ... 1st couple Left, Next Right**, some dancers will be able to describe the movement pattern, but not the individual names of the "basics" that produced the pattern.

In the dancer's mind, the above sequence is stored in their memory as one continuous routine. If you alter the flow after the **Double Pass Thru** by calling **Cloverleaf** or **Centers In**, the dancers will search their minds for information on how to dance the "basics." They have expectations about what

they think the caller may call following a **Double Pass Thru**. They may also look around to see what other dancers are doing. Then they will try and follow their example.

The dancers expect **Centers In** to be followed by a **Cast Off 3/4s**. If the caller uses any other movement, you will see dancers hesitate. They are considering if they might be doing something wrong and will only proceed once they have decided they are doing what the caller asked them to do.

Following a **Double Pass Thru**, most dancers will be comfortable with the lead couple doing something to make them face the trailing couple. The choices could be **Partner Trade**, **California Twirl**, **Wheel Around**. Of these three options, **Wheel Around** would have the lowest success. The success rate increases with **Partner Trade** and **California Twirl** because most dancers have some previous experience with these two "basics."

Most dancers will not expect a **Cloverleaf** because callers seldom call **Cloverleaf**. However, after a caller uses a **Cloverleaf** following a **Double Pass Thru** several times during one probran, the connection between the two "basics" will become routine. If the experience is not reenforced, after a time, **Cloverleaf** will be forgotten again.

Just considering the above example, the likely success rate for **Double Pass Thru ... 1st couple Left ... Next Right**, can be expected to be successful for 95% of the squares. **Double Pass Thru ... Leaders Trade** would be successful for maybe 80% of the squares. **Double Pass Thru ... Cloverleaf** will be successful for maybe 60% of the squares the first time it's called in a

dance program

Be careful of how much variety you add to the dancer's memory burden. Most dancer's enjoy being occasionally surprised, but surprises get old very quickly.

How many failures do you want them to suffer? If the goal of success to failure is 85% success and no more than 15% failure, callers need to be very careful of the material they ask the dancers to dance.

Dancers have more fun dancing patterns they have danced before. Most dancers don't mind learning new patterns, but the caller needs to be clever about how he/she does the teaching. The caller should pick high success options. For example, the following setup is different than seen on most MWSD floors, but most square dancers will have a high rate of success in dancing the sequence?

SS-CB

**Heads/Sides Star Thru ... Zoom ... Double Pass Thru ... Face Your Partner ... Star Thru ... Centers California Twirl ...**

**Heads/Sides Star Thru ... Double Pass Thru ... Face Your Partner ... Pass Thru ... Bend the Line ... Star Thru ... Centers Pass Thru ...**

The only movement that may cause problems is having the dancers **Face Their Partner** after a **Double Pass Thru**. The maneuver should have a high success rate. From this starting point, a dozen other variations can be introduced to build dancer confidence. If the Module fails for enough dancers, then the resolution is only a few steps away.

Many callers are tempted to create choreography that stretches the definition of each "basic" That seldom provides an enjoyable dancing experience for average dancers.

Dancers who enjoy testing their understanding of the sometimes complex definitions of some "basics" should find like-minded dancers and hire a caller to meet their needs. When they are dancing with average dancers, they should enjoy what average dancers enjoy.

On the caller's side of the mike, if the club officers want to designate one tip to use DBD concepts, the caller should let the dancers be aware of the possibility of having to stand around a lot.

It's a balancing act for the caller. No caller should assume that any dancer will be able to dance what the caller calls. It will vary with every audience. It will change between the start and the end of program. The caller will have to adjust accordingly.

The goal of providing choreography that 85% of the dancers can dance 85% of the time is reasonable. It's up to the caller to provide it.